Bittersweet

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Ryuko and Satsuki have a heart-to-heart right after the Fall of Honnouji, where they discuss the past, the present, and their future. Tooth-rotting sister/family fluff

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Introduction
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Ryuko tugged a little on the blanket covering her. Not because she wanted to better shield her naked body underneath, but because it honestly felt strange to have cloth on her bare skin. Non-sentient cloth. Intellectually, she knew the cotton blanket was warm and comfortable, but she couldn't help but feel it to be itchy. Her skin crawled underneath it, causing her to grimace.

She would always miss Senketsu. Always. He was her closest friend, aside from Mako. They were a pair, two in one, and had together faced adversity of the highest degree. And she intended to honor his memory by wearing cute clothes - cuter clothes that would indeed dye him green with envy - but fidgeting with the blanket across her shoulders, she wondered if she ever would be able to feel comfortable in them again.

It might be harder than I thought to repay you like that, Senketsu, she thought. *But I will do it. For you.*

She'd sensed another person approaching her right side and lifted up her gaze expecting to see Mako, but was more than a little stunned to find Satsuki standing next to her instead. The woman was also still naked, with a similar gray blanket draped along her shoulders and wrapped around her body. Her face was framed by her thick, long, black hair, as usual, but now it looked in need of a good combing. And again, to Ryuko's surmounting surprise, Satsuki wore a tiny smirk on her lips. Her eyebrows were still heavily set in their usual way, but her eyes underneath them were genial and kind.

It wasn't until rising steam blurred her fixation on Satsuki's face did Ryuko notice the two cups of warm drink in the older girl's hands. She looked down to find that Satsuki had one of those mugs outstretched towards her.

"Here," she finally said, nudging it forward for her to take it.

Still reeling, Ryuko stretched forward and took the offered drink. "T-Thanks," she managed. She darted her eyes downward and away when she felt Satsuki lean back against the concrete slab behind them and contemplatively sip her drink. Not a word was spoken. Ryuko didn't sense any counter emotion in Satsuki. Not even the cool, frigid vibe she usually gave off. She just seemed… content.

Still a little confused, Ryuko finally looked down into her cup and was surprised again to find a frothy, auburn liquid. This wasn't the tea Ryuko had been expecting it to be.

She twisted her head towards Satsuki's. "What, uh…?"

"It's hot chocolate," informed the older woman, not missing a beat. "I asked Soroi to make it for you."

Ryuko's eyes widened, nothing short of taken aback. At this, Ryuko suddenly became aware that in the distance, around nearby pieces of rubble, the Mankanshoku's, the Elite Four, Nudist Beach, former club presidents, and all the others present for the fall of Honnouji were gathered around conversing happily and enjoying hot drinks prepared by none other than Mitsuzo Soroi, Satsuki's faithful butler. How he managed to accommodate himself with enough supplies to service an entire sea of people at this time and place was beyond her.

Ryuko squinted a little to notice that there were even tiny marshmallows floating in the steaming drink. To say she was humbled by the action was an understatement. "N-No, I really mean it! Thank you. You didn't have to do that for me…"

The older woman opened her eyes and shifted them to meet Ryuko's, that small smile still present. She waved her hand absently. "I wanted to. And don't be that way, you certainly deserve to have a drink you actually like after the day you've had."

Something in Ryuko's chest fluttered at that, offering her a warmth that was not from the tepid drink in her hands. She smiled while

gesturing to the mug. "Still though, thanks."

Satsuki dipped her head in acknowledgement.

Ryuko finally brought the mug to her lips, blowing on it gently before taking a short sip. The hot chocolate immediately tingled her taste buds, little crystals of sugar sparking on her tongue. She licked her smiling lips hungrily after swallowing. The rich drink warmed the rest of her body delightfully as it traveled down her dry throat.

"Wow, this is delicious!" she happily informed, then immediately dove for another gulp.

Satsuki lightly chuckled, "I'm glad," while letting her eyes linger on Ryuko for a few moments, then closing them again and returning her attention to her tea.

The two girls stood and drank in silence together. The friendly proximity was actually quite welcome, so neither made an attempt to shift or move away at all. Definitely more relaxed and not so somber from her previous thoughts of Senketsu, Ryuko took the time to curiously observe her surroundings. Of course, what she found was nothing more than an eyesore, and certainly didn't fill her with the warmth the hot chocolate did. What had once been the center of Honnouji Academy was now a graveyard of fallen concrete slabs, rubble, and uprooted dirt.

Gripping the smooth ceramic with both hands and savoring its fading warmth, Ryuko finally broke the silence. "Must kinda suck to see your 'empire' like this, huh?"

Satsuki lowered her cup from her lips and settled her eyes on the scene before her. "Honestly… it's more bittersweet," she answered at length.

Ryuko turned her gaze. "Really?"

"Yes." Satsuki's blue eyes flickered down to her cup to stare at her reflection before returning back up. "Creation cannot happen without destruction, and vice-versa. This may be the end of my original Honnouji Academy, but it's also the end of a life-consuming endeavor. And with that a new Honnouji Academy and a new, better world can arise. The pang of this loss is nothing compared to the excitement I feel in meeting the brightness of that future, head-on."

Ryuko, once again, found herself transfixed on Satsuki. The woman's profile was smiling still, only this time a little wider. She was staring up in awe at the shining sun, her blue eyes catching the light and burning with an internal elation that caused that familiar seizing sensation to rise in Ryuko's chest again. Accompanying that feeling was a swell of pride - honored and pleased that she had helped put that far-off look of contentment and joy on Satsuki's frown-accustomed face. Never would she have guessed Satsuki's happiness to be this contagious.

Ryuko lowered her head, grinning satisfyingly and relaxed enough where she released one hand on the mug and placed it behind the small of her back. She shifted her shoulders more flat against the concrete slab and sighed, "Glad to hear that."

"Mhm," hummed Satsuki, then lowered her chin back down from the sky. As she did so, her contended, half-lidded eyes immediately traveled to Ryuko beside her. It didn't take more than catching that equally composed look on the younger woman's face to officially light a similar fire in Satsuki's chest.

"And you know…" she prompted as she too released a hand from the side of her own cup and carefully glided it down over to Ryuko's.

The younger woman felt slender fingers hook around her wrist and gently guide it away from her back, to which then those fingers smoothly entwined with her own. Immediately, Ryuko was pulled from her reverie and stared down at their combined hands before whipping up again to meet Satsuki - blue eyes wide with surprise and curiosity and mouth agape, unable to form words.

The shared warmth of their palms pooled together to create a sensation that traveled up both their arms.

"… I would be honored if you would meet that future with me; at my side."

And instantly, Ryuko was barreled back into the past. The recent past. For the way Satsuki's genial eyes bore into her own and that satisfied smile spoke more words of promise and comfort reminded Ryuko of the instant she regained consciousness upon falling back to earth. Like before, she found any and all of her normal, snarky comebacks to be uprooted and tossed away without a second thought. She even felt that similar ruddy blush rise to her cheeks as she returned that genuine grin with one of her own.

"Well, I'm not goin' anywhere," she assured, giving Satsuki's hand a tight squeeze. "So you can count on me to be there."

The flicker Ryuko noticed in Satsuki's piercing gaze implied that her words had struck deep within the older woman. And just when she thought she'd never see that smile grow any bigger, it did. It did and Ryuko felt her heart all but stop when the distance was suddenly shortened between them and she felt those very lips lightly touch the top of her head to whisper a wholesome, "Thank you…"

The two stayed like this for some time; the shoulder-to-shoulder proximity causing their whole body heat to steadily coalesce into a shared, soothing temperature. Ryuko wasn't sure whether it was this that caused a deeper blush to stain her cheeks, or the sole idea of Satsuki Kiryuin being this comfortable while this close to her. She decided that whatever it was was as equally comforting for her as well, and that it made her not want to pull away or retreat even an inch.

If anything, she felt herself especially greedy in wanting more.

"Aw, screw it," Ryuko finally mumbled after some time; setting her mug down on a nearby rock and then swiftly wrapping her arms

around the older woman's back and pulling her in closely. "C'mere already…"

Satsuki was certainly taken aback, but made no move to retreat. She merely stared wide-eyed down at the scruffy-haired head nuzzled at her chest, occupying her torso, with her own arms held on either side of her. "Ryuko, you…"

"You hugged me before, now I gotta return the favor…" she said simply. Ryuko then contemplated the extra words still on her tongue, a little hesitant to actually say them aloud. But then she ceded into the indescribably wonderful warmth and serenity that washed over her at having the older woman held against her, and realized there was trust to be found here. And so the remaining words rolled out with surprising ease.

"That, and… I also just wanna hug you."

The next part, however, after a pause, was said at such a whisper it was almost undetectable.

But Satsuki heard it, as loud and clear as if spoken directly into her ear: "That's the kind of thing sisters do, right?"

And it sucked the breath right out of her lungs.

But despite her sentiment-induced asphyxiation, Satsuki found her arms inching closer and closer to Ryuko, completely drawn to her and the anticipation of holding that unique warmth for herself once again. To once again repay the younger woman for all she'd said and done for her, and all the trust she'd so graciously given in their short but epic time together. Ready for the now forever constant give and take of their mutual affection.

She was practically intoxicated with the emotional desire by the time she finally returned the gesture - gathering up the younger woman in an embrace and filling in any possible distance between them. It was still a tad strange and otherworldly, but not the least bit unpleasant.

"So I've heard," she answered in her own delicate whisper - words meant for Ryuko only.

"Good," Ryuko smiled, tightening her hold and burying her head a little deeper into the now incredibly soft blanket surrounding her sister. "'Cuz I think I could get used to this."

Satsuki gently folded her eyes shut and reveled in the soft, comforting warmth in her arms that was Ryuko - not taking a single, indescribably wonderful second of it for granted. All other thoughts were chased away after the last lingering one was passed through her lips in a pleased sigh.

"Me too, *imouto…* "

As the sun shown down again on the two sisters, and feeling more at home and at peace in that moment than she had in her whole life, Ryuko found her thoughts drifting back to Senketsu again.

She realized that the sentient seifuku wouldn't have left so easily had there not been a world awaiting Ryuko's return - had there not been anything or anyone remaining that would keep her safe and happy. And the deeper she melted into Satsuki's embrace, the more she understood whom that "anyone" had turned out to be.

Senketsu had seen Satsuki's devotion, Satsuki's loyalty and compassion for her long-lost sister. She'd kept it under wraps well enough in the heat of battle, but had allowed Senketsu to see it. When they feigned synchronization to bring Ryuko back from Junketsu's brainwashing, he got a taste of it - how far Satsuki was willing to go to save the girl she had already accepted as her sister. When his words had finally managed to reach someone other than Ryuko, that person being Satsuki, the first words she said to him were how it pained her to see Ryuko hurting herself through her blind anger.

He knew. He'd seen and heard it all. And he was convinced without a shred of doubt that Ryuko would be all right. There would be

someone who would care for Ryuko in the same way he had. Ryuko would no longer be lonely; she would always have a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on, and a hug to share. And Satsuki assured him that she would be the one to give it all, and that she wanted to.

Satsuki - who shared Ryuko's blood.

The same blood he'd come to love and cherish and consider his own.

A new and better world had indeed been born - and with that, new relationships could form and new leaves could be turned over. Newer and cuter clothes could be worn. The past would always linger with its memories, but only as reminders of what had been lost in order to welcome what had risen in its place.

And the thought was deliciously bittersweet.